

Sustainable Fisheries



The Sustainable Fisheries Division provides stewardship of living marine resources through science-based conservation and management and the promotion of healthy marine ecosystems

Goal

The primary goal of the Sustainable Fisheries Division is to maintain healthy fish stocks, eliminate overfishing, rebuild overfished stocks, and increase the long-term economic and social benefits to the nation from our living marine resources.

Primary Activities

The Sustainable Fisheries Division of the Northeast Regional Office administers and implements programs involving the conservation and utilization of marine resources in the Northeastern United States. The Division also facilitates and expedites the approval and implementation of fishery management plans, and amendments to those plans, for those fisheries located in the Northeast, such as sea scallops; summer flounder; cod, haddock, yellowtail flounder and other groundfish; surfclams; ocean quahogs; squid; Atlantic mackerel; butterfish; monkfish; Atlantic herring; bluefish, black sea bass; scup; spiny dogfish; tilefish; deep-sea red crab; and skates.

Northeast domestic fisheries are managed on a cooperative basis by the Regional Fishery Management Councils, the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils to be specific, and NOAA Fisheries Service. The Councils develop proposed actions for the managed species and, after Agency review and approval, the Sustainable Fisheries Division implements the approved measures through regulations. It is the responsibility of the Division, in consultation with other Divisions and General Counsel Northeast, to ensure that all fishery management actions comply with the entire suite of applicable policies and statutes. The Division also implements fishery management actions, manages leasing programs, issues exempted fishery permits, monitors catches and discards, and opens/closes fisheries, as necessary.

Partnering and Interagency Coordination

In addition to working closely with the Councils, the Sustainable Fisheries Division's roles and responsibilities require numerous other partnerships, both internal and external to the agency, that are essential to meeting the goals mentioned above. For example, internal to the agency, the



Partnerships are essential to implement effective fishery regulations, monitor harvest limits, and coordinate activities related to jointly managed species to the benefit of not only the fish, but to those that have a stake in the health of the resources health

Sustainable Fisheries Division consults with the Protected Resources Division to ensure fishery management actions comply with the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. The Division also consults with the Habitat Division on matters regarding essential fish habitat, and works closely with the Fishery Statistics Division to monitor a fishery activities and to take timely inseason actions. In addition, they work closely with the NOAA Law Enforcement to ensure that fishermen understand and comply with the rules.

The Sustainable Fisheries Division also works directly with those outside the agency, such as the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and personnel from the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. Also, through direct involvement with the Councils, the Division regularly consults with members of the fishing industry (commercial and recreational fishermen, processors) and environmental groups. The Division also consults with the U.S. Coast Guard and individuals from other Federal agencies and programs, like the National Marine Sanctuary Program, in the development of regulations. Lastly, the Division is also involved in international discussions and agreements with Canada for a number of transboundary species, including groundfish species, Atlantic mackerel, and spiny dogfish. Division personnel also participate in meetings of the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization. These partnerships are essential to implement effective fishery regulations, monitor harvest limits, and coordinate activities related to jointly managed species to the benefit of not only the fish, but to those that have a stake in the health of the resources health, as well.

Fisheries Mandate

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, known as the Magnuson-Stevens Act, is the primary Federal fishery statute for the United States. The Magnuson-Stevens Act authorizes the Federal Government to regulate fishing from 3 miles offshore out to 200 miles. The Magnuson-Stevens Act was amended in 1996 by the Sustainable Fisheries Act, which made several substantive changes regarding bycatch and the conservation of habitat, and added new standards for fishery conservation that the Councils and NOAA Fisheries Service must meet in managing Federal fisheries. Additional changes in the Magnuson-Stevens Act are expected in 2006.

Recent Accomplishments

The Northeast multispecies (groundfish) fishery is one of the Nation's most historic and valuable fisheries. It is also one of the most diverse, complex, litigious, and challenging to manage. A major change to the way this fishery is managed was implemented in May 2004, through Amendment 13 to the Fishery Management Plan. Amendment 13 established strict rebuilding schedules for several overfished species of groundfish, and a rigorous process to reassess the effectiveness of management measures through periodic reviews and adjustments. The first of these was scheduled to occur in May 2006. Stock assessment updates in the summer of 2005 revealed that, while many stocks were either not overfished or were rebuilding on schedule, others were not; those stocks required additional management measures to reduce fishing mortality. Because of the complexity and contentiousness of the necessary actions, the New England Fishery Management Council was delayed in completing the document (Framework 42) to implement the necessary measures. To meet the May 1, 2006, deadline for adjustment measures and to protect the groundfish stocks from overfishing, the Northeast Regional Office of NOAA Fisheries Service prepared an emergency action, on a very fast timeline, to fill the void while the Council completed Framework 42. This emergency action was successfully implemented on May 1, 2006.

The Division has worked closely with the New England Fishery Management Council over the past several years to develop a major amendment (Amendment 1) to the Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan. This action would implement a limited access program for the fishery to ensure that those with the greatest history and dependence on this fishery can keep fishing in a sustainable manner. The Amendment is currently under Secretarial review.

The Division is leading a joint effort among NOAA Fisheries Service, the New England Fishery Management Council, and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council to develop standardized bycatch reporting methodologies for all 13 of the region's Fishery Management Plans. This is a major effort involving complex scientific and statistical considerations. The Northeast Fisheries Science Center is providing extensive technical support for this effort, as well. Once completed, these amendments will describe the process by which bycatch in each fishery will be monitored and assessed, and will bring all of the FMPs into compliance with the Magnuson-Stevens Act requirements for quantifying bycatch.

The Division is working with both Councils to develop new limited access privilege approaches to management of some regulated species. Although sometimes controversial, this management approach may help to address issues related to safety, marketing, and capacity



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Applicable Laws

The Sustainable Fisheries Division reviews all fishery actions to ensure compliance with all applicable laws, including the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the Regulatory Flexibility Act, the Administrative Procedure Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and other statutes and executive orders that govern actions involving the conservation and utilization of marine resources in the Northeast Region.

Ecosystem Management

Recently, both the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils conducted a series of public scoping meetings to determine people's perceptions regarding ecosystem-based fisheries management. An ecosystem approach to management would consider multiple components of the ecosystem (biological, chemical, and physical) and their interactions. This would include an appreciation of natural ecosystem dynamics, and explicitly recognize that man is part of the system and seek to include stakeholders in setting management goals. The intent of these meetings was to gather the broadest possible views on topics essential to incorporating ecosystem approaches into fisheries management, with a primary focus on the following areas: local or regional ecosystems and issues specific to them; ecosystem level indicators of a healthy fishery; community-based or collaborative fisheries management; and matching management "tools" to management objectives. Results of these meetings can be found in a number of summary reports posted on the New England Fishery Management Council's website located at www.nefmc.org.

Interaction with Science Center

The Division works closely with its scientific counterpart, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, located in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, to technically review fishery management documents. The Northeast Fisheries Science Center is the research arm of NOAA Fisheries Service in the Northeast region. The Center plans, develops, and manages a multidisciplinary program of basic and applied research to: (1) better understand living marine resources of the Northeast Continental Shelf Ecosystem from the Gulf of Maine to Cape Hatteras, and the habitat quality essential for their existence and continued productivity; and (2) to provide to management, industry, and the public, options for the conservation and utilization of living marine resources, and for the restoration and maintenance of marine environmental quality.